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MBTA gets wakeup call on hours

By Thomas C. Palmer Jr.
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Rick Webb, a carefree freelance graphic designer and rock-band guitarist from Allston, got out of bed yesterday for the first time in four days — a sort of sleep-in to protest the MBTA's limited hours.

"It's really difficult for people who have second-shift jobs or people in the bars," said Webb, whose band is called Rocket Burst From the Streetlamps. "The bars

Hearing to consider longer night service

getting out at 2 really frightens me. I see the people who should not be driving."

Most of the MBTA's buses and subways run from 5:15 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. daily — something people like Webb are trying to change.

The Legislature's joint House and Senate transportation committee will hold a

public hearing this morning on a bill sponsored by Senator Steven A. Tolman, a Democrat from Brighton, to study extending the T's hours.

Webb, 27, whose "kind of arbitrary" protest was described in the Allston-Brighton Tab, said "this is a big issue" for people in his age group. "We are prone to nightclubs and bars and things. We work, but we don't have enough money for cars."

Tolman said 24-hour MBTA service
MBTA, Page B5



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JOANNE RATHE

Doctoral student Sami Kotilainen (left) chatted with sauna operator Pia Lindman on the MIT campus in Cambridge. Lindman, an artist and architect from Finland, built the sauna as an offshoot of her work toward a master's degree.

Students sweating it out at MIT

By Chana R. Schoenberger
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

CAMBRIDGE — As students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology scurry by, the stress of finals in the air, a few stop to read an unusual sign posted in front of the Stratton Student Center: "Undress and leave your clothes in the dressing room."

No, it's not an ad for a campus brothel. It's for the new sauna.

Built of pine boards and white plastic sheeting, the Finnish sauna sits outside in the middle of campus, just a few feet from Massachusetts Avenue. All day,

students at this usually high-strung university leave their backpacks on the grass and disappear into the sauna's interior, emerging an hour or so later with wet hair and towels wrapped around their waists.

The sauna is the brainchild of Pia Lindman, a 33-year-old Fulbright scholar, artist, and architect from Finland who built the sauna as an offshoot of her work toward a master's degree in visual arts at MIT.

Wearing her white bathhouse attendant's smock, the word "sauna" embroidered on it in phonetic characters, Lindman explained that the sauna, which

SAUNA, Page B6

Students sweating it out at MIT

■ SAUNA

Continued from Page B1

took six weeks to put together and will be open until May 22, is one part architecture and one part politics. Her goal, she said, is to bring to Boston "the most democratic space in the world."

Students lining up for their turn in Lindman's free sauna agreed. "When you're sitting naked in a steamy room, it sort of strips away tokens of status, like watches and clothes," said James R. White, 23, a graduate student in mechanical engineering who came to the sauna with two other students from his lab.

Sitting on a pine bench as other students tossed a Frisbee around on the grass nearby, Reid Anderson, a 19-year-old sophomore at the institute, waited his turn.

"It caught my interest when I walked by," Anderson said. "My only fear was that you might have to run naked from the student center."

The fear of nakedness, Lindman discovered, is as common in New England as it is rare in her native Finland. After her own experiences in local saunas, where she was shocked to see fellow bathers wear swimsuits or towels instead of letting their naked bodies absorb the steam, Lindman de-

signed her "Hybrid New England-Finnish Sauna."

Lindman's cross-cultural sauna includes a private changing area and a red velvet curtain that divides the two bathers, a touch she calls "architectural irony." The bathers can jostle each other through the curtain as they undress, and they share the same steam, yet they cannot see one another.

In keeping with the tradition, though, bathers are encouraged to cool off on the benches outside the sauna after they've finished, talking and sharing some down time.

In Finland, the sauna is a way of life: 1.6 million saunas serve 5 million Finns and the average Finn goes to the sauna at least once a week.

There, she said proudly, "even the government goes to the sauna together to discuss and find solutions" to political problems.

Even the placement of the sauna represents a bit of Finnish national pride. Lindman calls it the "Finnish Corner" of the MIT campus. The Kresge Chapel and the Kresge Auditorium, which faces the sauna across the grass, were both designed by famous Finnish architect Eero Saarinen, while Baker House, a nearby residence building, was designed by Alvar Aalto, another architect from Fin-

land.

But these subtleties were not top of mind this day. Some stared. Some recalled MIT's rich history of public drama — the cow on top of the university's dome, the balloon on the football field during a Harvard-Yale game.

And others seemed genuinely impressed by the effort, which was supported by the MIT Council for the Arts, the State Committee of the Arts in Finland, and Saunatec, a Minnesota-based sauna maker.

"I wish this was here earlier," said White's fellow lab worker, Nathan R. Kane, 30, as he stood barefoot on the grass after his turn in the sauna. "It's a great break."

But the sauna will not die when it is taken down next weekend. Lindman will take it with her to New York City after getting her master's degree next month.

In New York, where she will work as an assistant to her current thesis adviser, MIT professor Krzysztof Wodiczko, Lindman will try to erect the portable sauna again in another public space, perhaps a park.

But her real dream, she said, is to secure money so she can make the sauna mobile and travel the country spreading the good word.

Call it the SaunaMobile.